

Annual Report of the Constitution and Standards Committee 2017/18

Lead Member: Cllr Nigel Taylor, Chair of the Constitution and Standards Committee

Lead Officer: Scott Wooldridge, Strategic Manager - Governance and Risk

Contact Details: tel (01823) 357628 or e-mail: swooldridge@somerset.gov.uk

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Constitution and Standards Committee is required by the Constitution to make an annual report to the County Council regarding its work since May 2017.
- 1.2. The Constitution and Standards Committee was formed following the May 2017 elections and its functions include responsibility to maintain an effective, up to date and legally compliant Constitution; considering proposals from Council committees for changes to the constitutional arrangements of the Council; take all required decisions in respect of the County Council elections; promoting high standards of conduct by Members, Co-opted Members and Officers; monitoring the operation of the Members' Code of Conduct and the Council's Whistleblowing Policy.

2. Background

- 2.1. The Committee has met a total of 5 times since it was formed in May 2017.
- 2.2. The Council at its meeting on 24 May 2017 agreed to amalgamate the Constitution Committee and the Standards Committee to form a new Constitution and Standards Committee. In making this decision the Council considered the recommendations from both committees supporting an amalgamation.
- 2.3. Political proportionality was waived in relation to the elected membership of the Committee with one member per political group appointed. The co-opted members of the former Standards Committee were appointed to the new Committee as non-voting members and with a renewed term of office. In line with other committees, the County Council appoints the Chair of the Committee.
- 2.4. The Committee's operating arrangements are well established and it is working well within its terms of reference (set out within the Constitution).
- 2.5. Support to the Committee comes principally from the Monitoring Officer and County Solicitor. The Committee wishes to place on record its thanks for the continued quality of the support and advice that it receives, in particular from the former Monitoring Officer Julian Gale.

3. Work Programme

- 3.1.** The Committee's work programme over the last year has been varied and has included:
- Recognition of the Committee's terms of reference and operating arrangements
 - Recommending to Full Council the appointment of honorary aldermen and alderwomen
 - Annual Review of the Constitution (July 2017)
 - Changes to Contract Procedure Rules and Standing Orders
 - New rules to strengthen standards for Councillors (Government consultation)
 - Access to Information and Constitutional Provisions (October 2017, February 2018 and April 2018 meetings)
 - Changing the names of Electoral Divisions (October 2017 and February 2018)
 - Review of ethical standards in local government (Government consultation)
 - Annual review of the Constitution (May 2018)
 - Draft annual report of the Committee to Council (May 2018)
- 3.2.** The Forward Work Programme includes:
- Ongoing review of the Constitution to ensure it remains fit for purpose
 - Review of the Council's audio recording arrangements and their publication
 - Review of County Councillor Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks completed since the Council agreed a revised policy in November 2017.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1.** The Committee remains committed to promoting high standards of conduct by Members, Co-opted Members and Officers and for the policies and processes which support this aim, together with ensuring that the Council maintains an effective, up to date and legally compliant Constitution.

5. Consultations undertaken

- 5.1** The Committee meetings are open to all County Councillors to attend and contribute to its meetings.

6. Implications

- 6.1** The Committee considers carefully, and often asks for further information about the implications as outlined in, the reports considered at its meetings.

7. Background papers

- 7.1.** Further information about the Committee including dates of meetings, agendas and reports from previous meetings are available via the Council's website and can be found at:

<http://www1.somerset.gov.uk/council/boards.asp?boardnum=9>

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author